



Assessing the Open Working Group on SDGs Outcome Document: Key Messages

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This IRF2015 brief provides an overview of our assessment of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Outcome Document, and highlights key challenges that need to be addressed in the year ahead to ensure an agenda that is universally-relevant and transformative. IRF2015 is preparing a more in-depth assessment that will elaborate on these key messages and propose ways for moving the agenda forward.

I. The OWG outcome

An open and member state-driven process

The OWG arrived at its outcome through a member state-driven and broadly participatory process. Extensive consultation provided much-needed space for a diverse cross-section of civil society and the general public to provide input. An open process where stakeholder views are heard and incorporated will continue to be essential to reaching a strong post-2015 agreement and building commitment for subsequent action.

A comprehensive framework

The OWG delivered on its mandate to put forward a comprehensive sustainable development framework with poverty eradication at the core. The SDGs go well beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in addressing issues critical to sustainable poverty eradication and human prosperity—such as agriculture, water, energy, inequality, cities, sustainable consumption and production, ecosystems and biodiversity, and effective and inclusive governance. This comprehensive framework provides the basis for shaping a more universal and transformative agenda to address today's global development challenges.

A more balanced framework

The OWG outcome presents greater balance between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development compared to the MDGs. However, critical work remains to better integrate the three dimensions and to make explicit the links between proposed goals and targets—both potential synergies and potential trade-offs. The post-2015 agenda must support governments, civil society and the private sector to understand how different goals and targets can reinforce one another or potentially work at cross-purposes, and identify ways to manage this.

Tackling systemic issues

The OWG outcome goes much further than the MDGs in addressing critical barriers to progress, including inequality, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, weak and exclusive governance systems, and vulnerability to shocks. By recognizing these more systemic factors and related enabling conditions, the outcome document initiates a critical conversation about the underlying causes of persistent poverty and unsustainable development—topics that must be further developed in the agenda.

Aspirational but not yet actionable

While the proposed goals set high aspirations for the post-2015 agenda, the majority of targets do not provide clear measurable benchmarks against which ambition and progress can be assessed. This may be unavoidable in a universal agenda that must address a wide diversity of country contexts. A major challenge for the intergovernmental process leading up to the UN Summit in September 2015 and beyond will be putting in place the conditions and incentives needed to make the global goals and targets ‘actionable’ and to ensure national ambition and global accountability.

II. Towards a transformative post-2015 agenda: Key challenges ahead

Forge a transformative vision and normative framework for global development

From the OWG outcome document, at least three overarching principles can be derived as the basis for a new global development narrative that articulates the transformative potential of the post-2015 agenda for all countries and stakeholders, from heads of state to local communities:

- 1) *Leave no one behind;*
- 2) *Attain equity and prosperity for all;*
- 3) *Ensure the planet’s capacity to sustain present and future generations.*

These principles also can be the basis for a sustainable development normative framework. While not legally binding, the post-2015 agenda could help establish a set of universal norms and rights by setting out how the international community defines and measures progress towards inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

Strengthen focus on economic transformation

Attaining these principles requires fundamental economic transformation to address the root causes of extreme poverty, rising inequality and ecological degradation. The inclusion of SDGs on economic growth, industrialization, and sustainable consumption and production reflect a recognition of the need for systemic change. But the goals and targets need to be even more ambitious and better integrated in order to transform economic systems and patterns of economic growth, which must be decoupled from environmental degradation in absolute terms. Reinforcing the OWG’s call for new metrics that go ‘beyond GDP’ to measure economic progress and human well-being can help drive this transition.

Forge an effective global partnership for sustainable development

A major need going forward is to build consensus on the shape and key elements of a new global partnership for sustainable development that is both ‘fit-for-purpose’ and transformative—and that can galvanize broad-based action across national and local governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector and civil society. To make the agreed goals as practical and useful as possible, the post-2015 agenda must go beyond stating what needs to be achieved and also identify how and by whom. Key issues include:

- *Delivering on commitments:* Who are the actors and stakeholders and how can they share the responsibility of implementing the agenda in a way that is fair? What policy and other instruments will be key to implementing the agenda? How to ensure adequate means are available, and how to mobilize effective global and national-level partnerships to scale up efforts towards achieving global and nationally-adapted goals and targets? How to more effectively integrate development, climate and global environmental finance under one overarching sustainable development financing and operational framework?
- *Monitoring progress and ensuring accountability:* Who will be accountable to whom? What monitoring and reporting frameworks are needed to measure progress, inform decision-making, and ensure transparency and accountability? What existing platforms and forums can be built upon? What new metrics are needed for measuring sustainable development and human well-being outcomes?

It is critical that those who will be responsible for future implementation—both state and non-state actors—are engaged now in the design of a new global partnership.

Look ahead to national commitment and implementation

To make the post-2015 agenda real, countries will need to adapt the global goals and targets to their national context and level of ambition. As development challenges differ across countries, national sustainable development strategies are needed which connect with existing structures for accountability and help ensure that the post-2015 framework becomes embedded in established policy, planning and implementation systems. This will require inclusive, accountable and effective multi-stakeholder processes at the national and local level, and further analysis and guidance on how to prioritize the many global targets and how to address their potential synergies and trade-offs.

About IRF2015

The *Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda* (IRF2015) is a collaboration of 11 international research institutions providing critical thinking, integrated analysis and awareness-raising to inform the post-2015 development agenda. IRF2015 partners envision a post-2015 development agenda that is universal in scope, takes an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of global development challenges, and can lead to more sustainable and equitable development outcomes for all.

Partner Institutes

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)

Trinidad, West Indies
www.canari.org

Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)

Johannesburg, South Africa
www.osisa.org

Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (RIMISP)

Santiago, Chile
www.rimisp.org

Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

London, UK
www.odi.org.uk

Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)

Dakar, Senegal
www.codesria.org

Research Centre for Sustainable Development (RCSd)

Beijing, China
www.rcsd.org.cn

Development Alternatives (DA)

New Delhi, India
www.devalt.org

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)

Stockholm, Sweden
www.sei-international.org

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

Hayama, Japan
www.iges.or.jp

World Resources Institute (WRI)

Washington DC, USA
www.wri.org

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

London, UK
www.iied.org